Clare Oehler-O’Sullivan

Ms. Tanck

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Creative Writing Beyond the Classroom

The culture of reading and writing has been a part of my life since before I can remember. When we are young children, our parents influence much of what we do. I am lucky that throughout my childhood my mother and father were always encouraging me to read and write. As a toddler, objects around my house were labeled in big capital letters for me to read. I always enjoyed writing the ABC’s and my name with chalk out on our driveway. My family tells me now that I would also love listening, following the words, and looking at the pictures as they read me a story book. By Kindergarten I was already reading chapter books, with a little help from my mom of course! Reading at a young age helped me broaden my vivid imagination. It excited my parents that at such a young age I had quite the taste for a good story because they knew it would surely benefit me throughout my life.

The fact that no two books are quite the same helped me further develop my creativity. I learned creative ideas through reading that were apparent in all the different sorts of games I played outside of school. Growing up, I played every imaginative game possible, such as forest adventurer in what I called Utopia. In this game, my best friend Larissa and I would bike a mile and a half to Peregrine Lake, pretend to be fairies of the nature, and explore the woods around the lake. Larissa and I also composed the silliest skits for puff balls, teddy grahams, and stuffed animals to act out. One game that we played with ‘webkinz’ stuffed animals we called the ‘Boy-Girl’ game. In this game, our girl dogs would pair up with some handsome boy dogs and dance it up at the big high school prom. Furthermore, every holiday, my cousins and I spent a great amount of time writing plays to perform in front of our families. I continued to urge my older cousins Charlotte and Caroline to put on plays with me when they were well into their high school years. Embarrassingly enough for them, they tended to put up with me and go along with the plays. Around this age too, I began to question whether Santa Claus was real. One year, I left the note for Santa asking ‘can I have your audograf’. I expected a response, or more precisely, some form of proof. In addition, each night throughout December, I would expect that the Elf on the Shelf would respond to my every question. Writing and creative play as children give us freedom to express ourselves and our inquiries.

On the other hand, in middle school I learned the challenging lesson that there is a time and place for my creativity. My teacher, Mrs. Carso, assigned us a paper to write about World War II. I used my imagination to come up with all these outrageous scenes, places, people and situations that could have occurred during that time period, but in reality, did not. For instance, I wrote about the Nazis invading Texas and capturing all the Jews there. As I received a bad grade on that assignment, I was greatly disappointed. My teacher later called me up to explain to me that I was actually supposed to write about factual data regarding the war. However, she emphasized that she was impressed with my creativity and recommended that I take a creative writing class later in life. This would help me to display my creativity in the proper setting. Although I have yet to take a creative writing class, through the help of family, friends and teachers, I have found many ways to use my reading and writing skills to the fullest in their proper settings.

Speaking of literary experiences in school, one of my favorite semesters of English was my honors English second semester of sophomore year. My teacher was young and cheerful, so it was ironic that we read such old and dark works such as Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome, Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein, and Edgar Allen Poe’s short stories. We also read Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre that semester too. Jane Eyre has to be my all-time favorite book I have read in class; I enjoyed it so much that I started reading it again outside the class. Even though it was a dark book, I loved the epic romance between Jane and Rochester and all of the plot twists. Although I certainly had a lot of strange dreams that semester, I know that reading such brilliant literary works of the masters has made me a better writer. Indeed, reading books from various genres exposed me to additional topics that may interest me to write about later.

From childhood through my teenage years, my mom encouraged me to read every night before I go to sleep because that is what she and my dad always do. However, during the last two years of high school I had a hard time focusing on reading because the school books I had been reading were putting me to sleep because they bored me! I didn’t particularly enjoy reading non-fiction books in school because so many of the other subjects were dedicated to learning factual events. I longed for reading to be more make-believe and fictional. Senior year of high school, my English teacher gave us the advice that we shouldn’t just be reading books for school and that we should also read books on our own that are similar to the movies and TV shows that interest us. This way, we can grow fonder of reading in general. Since I love the show Jane the Virgin, which is full of romance and suspense, I chose to read the Twilight series. I now read more than I ever have and moreover, I enjoy what I am reading and can focus more when I really do need to sit down and read something for school. Some of my all-time favorite books include 11 Birthdays by Wendy Mass, When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead, The Hunger Games Series, and the Twilight Series. What these books all have in common is putting real life characters into other-worldly situations, and of course good elements of romance as well. Reading beyond class expectations broadens my horizons and makes me appreciate reading more.

I have found many ways to implement descriptive and creative writing beyond the classroom in my daily life. To keep track of my responsibilities, I often write lists. This helps me feel a sense of accomplishment as I check off items. I also find a lot of joy in writing long thank you letters to relatives, lengthy text messages to my friends to make them happy, and plenty of love letters to my boyfriend. Additionally, every year during my four years of high school cross country, my teammates and I wrote notes to each other, building each other up before big races. It was a great confidence building and team building exercise. But of all the writing I have done, what I am most proud of is The Happiness Project. It always frustrated me how in the future I might forget the little things that made me happy throughout the years. For Christmas 2015 I received The Happiness Project which is a 5-year journal where each day you write a couple of sentences about things that made you happy that day. I am now starting year four of writing in it and it makes me overjoyed to look back at what I was doing in previous years that made me happy. Through writing, I have gained the opportunity to express myself and relive some of my fondest memories.

Reading and writing can bring stories to life. Personally, I have grown a lot since I started reading books that I enjoy, writing creatively, and starting a journal. I hope that everyone will at some point find the joy of writing in their free time beyond classroom expectations.

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| **Rubric**  Your narrative… | Not achieved  (1.0) | Attempted or sometimes achieved  (2.0) | Achieved consistently  (3.0) | Excellently done throughout  (4.0) |  |
| **Storytelling:** does the piece tell a story/ narrative? Is it specific? Does it make use of strong narrative elements like concrete details/ images, etc.? (35%) |  |  | 3.8 |  | 1.33 |
| **Reflection/ Observation:** does the narrative engage in reflection/ answer the question “What is your relationship to literacy?” (35%) |  |  | 3.8 |  | 1.33 |
| **Organization:** does the narrative have a compelling structure? Is it well organized by plot, ideas, etc.?  (20%) |  |  | 3.9 |  | .78 |
| **Mechanics/**  **Professionalism:**  Spelling and grammar, paragraph unity, formatting, use of transitions.  (10%) |  |  |  | 4 | .4 |
|  |  |  |  |  | 3.81/4=  95.25% |